



June 14, 2018

The Honourable Adrian Dix
Minister of Health, Legislative Assembly of British Columbia
Room 337 Parliament Buildings
Victoria, BC V8V 1X4

Dear Minister Dix:

Re: Insulin pump coverage expansion

Diabetes Canada was pleased to be part of your recent announcement that, as of July 3, 2018, the age restriction for insulin pump coverage will be removed. Your decision will greatly benefit British Columbians living with insulin-dependent diabetes. As you know, insulin pumps can provide more disease management flexibility, enhance treatment satisfaction and improve glycemic control. However, their high cost has historically made them inaccessible to many adults over the age of 25. On behalf of the diabetes community in B.C., we again commend you for taking this important step toward improving quality of life for people with diabetes. Along with Ontario and Alberta, B.C. is demonstrating great leadership in recognizing that age should not be a barrier to accessing necessary diabetes management devices. We hope other provinces will follow suit.

At Diabetes Canada, we feel strongly that a treatment plan should always be individualized and should include options for care. Indeed, patient choice is the cornerstone of patient-centred care and policy. Given this, we were dismayed to learn after this announcement that you are taking a 'one size fits all' or tiered approach with respect to the funding of insulin pumps. As we understand it, the tier one device is the only system that will be fully reimbursed by the province. Patients (and their prescribers) who decide a different pump is best suited to their needs will require special approval and then could be subject to a deductible and co-pay. Though it was surely not your aim to disadvantage anyone, this policy will likely have that effect on the people in B.C. for whom the tier one device is not compatible or preferred.

Concerned British Columbians have already reached out to us to comment on the policy and its innate unfairness. We have included sample remarks below:

"I do not understand why [the Government of B.C.] will only be covering a single brand of pump when the initial cost looks the same for both the [tier one and tier two] pump. I have only ever been on [a tier two pump] (for close to 28 years). If I am forced to switch, this change will not improve diabetes care for me, but potentially make it worse."

"Did the medical decision-makers on the panel have first hand experience managing diabetes and using an insulin infusion pump? If not, how can they decide that the two main brands [currently available in Canada] are identical and only one brand of pump should be covered? The same method of therapy

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doesn't work for everyone... 'There are differences between systems (some subtle, some obvious) that make certain pumps better options for certain individuals. It is astounding that so many people are given little to no choice when it comes to selecting an insulin pump' ¹."

We have raised these points with you in correspondence and discussion earlier and regret that they have gone unheeded. We are disappointed that we were not consulted during the development of this policy, as together we could have avoided this unfavourable result. Diabetes Canada believes that people with diabetes have the right to choose the treatment modality that ideally fits their lifestyle and condition, and will allow them to optimize outcomes. Patients' ability to select between various insulin delivery systems can be critical to the successful management of diabetes and the achievement of their health potential.

Ultimately, as it currently stands, the insulin pump expansion policy simply does not support equal access to a variety of treatment options for people in B.C. We recommend that all insulin delivery systems available in Canada be options for equitable public reimbursement.

We feel there are several aspects of the policy that are unclear, namely the approval process and criteria to access the tier two device, whether someone will be required to switch from a tier two to a tier one device and what education and supports will be made available to facilitate this transition, and whether any special considerations will be provided for children with type 1 who are generally better served by the tier two device. The matter of inequitable access is critically important to our organization because of the detrimental impact it has on lives of people with diabetes, their families and communities.

On behalf of Diabetes Canada, I would like to respectfully request a meeting with you as soon as possible to review the new pump coverage policy and alternative measures that could preserve individual choice. Going forward, Diabetes Canada would like a seat at the table on policy discussions pertaining to diabetes and looks forward to working with you to enhance access to treatments for British Columbians.

Thank you for your consideration. My colleague Joan King (joan.king@diabetes.ca; 780-423-5722 x 1211), Director of Government Relations for Western Canada, will be in contact with your office.

Sincerely,

Sheila Kern
Regional Director, B.C. and Yukon
Diabetes Canada
c.c. Mitch Moneo, Assistant Deputy Minister, Pharmaceutical Services Division

¹ <http://integrateddiabetes.com/2018-new-insulin-pump-comparisons-and-reviews/>